critical digest

505 FIFTH AVENUE. N. Y. [illegible] Y.
MU 2-0326 [illegible]RAUS

May 12,1954 Vol VI No 35 $10 year The Weekly New York City Theatre Newsletter

New York Theatre Diary

Pianorama World- Broadway 5/12/54.A musical extravaganza presented by Helen Beatty Clarke and Bob L. Roberts. John Conte is master of ceremonies. Ken Clarke, Joseph Battista, David Saporton, Abba Bogin, and Jeanne Rosenblum featured at five pianos...Passion,Poison and Petrification by Shaw and Poor Aubrey by George Kelly presented by Tapestry Theatre at Davenport Theatre,138 E 27...The Pajama Game- St. James 5/13/54.George Abbott and Richard Bissell's new musical presneted by Brisson-Griffith-Prince. With John Raitt, Janis Paige and Eddie Foy,Jr...Fledermaus- City Center 5/19/54. Second limited run production of NYC Light Opera Company.

Current Theatre Reviews

Show-Boat- City Center 5/5/54. Though several NY daily critics thought the acting could have been better, they were unanimous in welcoming the first limited run production of the NYC Light Opera Company. Jerome Kern's music and Oscar Hammerstein II book and lyrics remain classics in American musical theatre they agreed. Kern is probably one of the most underrated of American composers,noted Funke,Times. Show Boat score is possessed of rich gayety,lyrical beauty and dramatic quality ,he summed up. Kerr, Herald Tribune, felt that only Marjorie Gateson fully suggests the curious compound of character,melodrama,sentiment and gayety needed, but the irresistible music made up for the acting. Burl Ives and Helena Bliss were tabbed as stars of the evening by Chapman,News,who rates the show a masterpiece. Lawrence Winters as Joe was cheered by all. Watts,Post, feared general production was on the lacklustre side, but still a pleasure to hear and see. Show is tasteful and big and fresh,without being tricky, commented Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun. Musical has always been a two-handkerchief show for McClain,Journal American,and present version fulfilled the quota Musical was staged by William Hammerstein.

Vernon Rice

Vernon Rice, drama editor of the NY Post, died at age 46. He had been suffering from a heart ailment since last July. Recently he had done most of his work from his apartment, and it was only within the last month that he started to go regularly to the theatre again. He was born in St Louis,and spent most of his youth in Muskogee, Okla. A graduate of the University of Oklahoma,he attended the 47 Workshop of Prof. George Pierce Baker at Yale. He joined the Post in 1934 and worked in various departments before he became drama editor. In June 1952 he was elected president of "Drama Desk",an organization of theatre reporters and editors.

Post drama critic Richard Watts,Jr. filed a column entitled "In Memory of A Friend." Vernon Rice loved the theatre so completely and unselfishly that not even the most skeptical could fail to see the truth of his devotion, Watts noted. He was a "constructive" critic. His activities, so practical,self-less,generous and imaginative, in the best interests of the summer playhouses, the off Broadway stages and the Equity Library Theatre will not soon be forgotton. He had the most wonderfully infectious laugh that first nighters have been privileged to hear since the death of Robert Benchley. Above all,Watts concludes,he was a man of the rarest integrity and the complete gentleman.

Off Broadway

A fourth theatre has been advised to close by the NYC Department of Licenses. Three one act plays presented at the first floor of the Capitol Building, 1639 Broadway by Irving Strous and Nicholas Bela. The producers were refused a concert license by the Department of Housing and Buildings...William Gass' production of Rope, which finally had settled down at Open Door ,55 W 3,closed after 15 performances...Circle in the Square, which still has not found a new arena theatre for next season, announces that it will produce Robert Tom's Minatour on Broadway in the fall...Originals Only,100 7th Ave South, offers its theatre Tuesdays,Wednesdays and Thursdays to groups having trouble finding a theatre.

Broadway Chapel Players will present their production of Fry's The Boy With A Cart May 17 at St James Church, Lancaster,Pa...Montserrat will be presented at Barbizon Plaza Theatre starting May 26 by Jack and Harry Gresen using many of the cast from the recent Equity Library production of the Hellman drama...Tapestry Theatre will present a series of one act plays for 6 performances starting May 12 at Davenport Theatre...Vicki Cummings will star in The Homeward Look, which John Garabedian and Phillip Meister will present at Theatre de Lys in June...Clarence Derwent, Douglas Watson, Peggy Wood and Aline MacMahon appear in May 24 reading of Euripides Ion at YMHA, 92nd St and Lexington Ave...Perchance to Dream, a new play by David Sawn, will be presented by "Dramarena Theatre" at Amato Theatre June 24.

Here Comes the Clowns, being revived at Cherry Lane Theatre by Theatre Album won a single mild pro notice from Atkinson,Times. Hawkins, World Telegram Sun, admitted some of Barry's fantasy was still confusing, but feared production failed due to an equal lack of rehearsal and firm guidance. Greenberg, Show Business,also filed a con notice due to the poor acting and direction.

Building Blocks,first production of Two by Four Theatre,83 E 4,was panned as a paperweight play. Tiny handsome theatre was rated better than play by Calta,Times.

Children's Theatre

King Coit Children's Theatre production of the Hindu epic Nala and Damayanti at the Sutton Hotel was highly recommended by Coleman, Mirror and Hawkins, WT&S. The new Sutton Hotel Theatre of the group is the gift of the Mellon Foundation. Cast ranging from age 3 to 12 assumes proper Hindu stylized acting, reviewers agreed.

Vaudeville

Palace stage show headed by Wally Vernon, Viggo Jahn, the Kovacs, Mia and Mattie, Three Wiles and Dubarry Sisters.

Theatre TV Comments

"Angels Auditions"- WABC TV- was judged a good idea by 3 critics, but all thought program,which presents scenes of plays which may be produced plus interviews, could be more interesting. Gross ,News, feels program shows what kind of material an investor must endure. Van Horne, WT&S,suggests it would be more interesting to see a famous actress go over the lines,rather than the audition actors. Francis,Billboard,listed as a novelty that didn't work well.

CRITICAL DIGEST- weekly digests NYC shows- news,reviews,comments. Tickets, critics reports. Drama books, records, theatre on TV. Ratings of Broadway films. SPECIAL SUMMER FEATURES. Perfect gift 52 weeks a year for "stage struck".$10 year. $12. 50 foreign.

___Bill Me Late ___Check Attached

Send to.....
Address.....
Subscriber's Name.....

Tune WNEW Around New York Thur 8 AM for "Off Broadway Round Up" by "CD". Sat after opening tune WNBC Ben Grauer 3 AM for "CD" quotes of reviews."

Green Room Department

PLAYWRIGHTS VIA TV...Anybody who wants to be a playwright should listen and watch the McCarthy-Army hearings on TV, suggests Chapman,News. Here he can see an imposing cast of characters at work, he can discover how they talk and how they act. And he also can learn that if he wants to write a realistic play for the stage, he must rely on the fiction which is the basis of drama. The Caine Mutiny Court Martial is real,right enough; its characters and events have the ring of truth in them. The trick lies in manuevering these characters and events so that they will make a play. The Caine Mutiny Court Martial is realism, the hearings at the capital are mere reality.

COLUMN TIPS...The majority of the angels of Pajama Game are dancers, show girls, etc who have invested $100 each, bears Walker...Robert Fryer and Lawrence Carr are hunting for a play for Tallulah Bankhead for next season, reports Kilgallen...The show outside Fifth Season last week was the result of the wife of a stagehand slugging his girlfriend,whispers Mitchell.

SHAKESPEARE CLUB RIOT...An unscheduled performance by a Shakespeare loving barge captain disrupted the annual meeting of the Shakespeare Club of NY, reports Asbury,Times. Capt McLaughlin objected in strong Elizabethan language borrowed freely from Shakespeare that the club meetings are dull and stupid. He also threatened court action to force improvement. Prof John H H Lyons rated it as one of the most disgraceful performances he ever saw.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Watts,Post, would have voted for Muriel Berkson, In the Summer House, for the Derwent Award...Tea and Sympathy should have won the Pulitizer Prize,comments Dash, Women's Wear. Both Caine Mutiny and Teahouse of the August Moon were adaptions, not original American dramas...Julie Harris in Mademoiselle Colombe provided one of the season's most superlative acting jobs, praises Sheaffer,Eagle.

INTERVIEW HI-LITE...William Hammerstein is the "spittin image" of his father in manner, commented Rice,Post in the last interview he filed. Bill will be the director of Show Boat and Carousel for the NYC Light Opera Company's first season. In the fall the son of Oscar Hammerstein II will co-produce The Geep with John Forsythe. The son is like his father in having the same soft voice, the same quiet behavior, and the same soothing quality of constant calm.

Pros & Cons by TMK

Vernon Rice, more than any other editor or critic, is responsible for the current wide coverage and interest in the Off Broadway movement. Before any of the other critics or editors found the courage to file stories and notices on theatre away from Times Square, he was climbing up to third floor showcases and climbing down to basement theatres. Many producers and press agents imposed upon him to see their "masterpieces." Out of kindness he went. And out of kindness he didn't file notices on the poorer products. Vernon's encouragement and friendship will be remembered for many,many,many years.

"The Stratford Adventure" film produced by the National Film Board of Canada is a worthwhile,though highly glossed,account of how the brave citizens of Stratford,Ontario set up an outstanding artistic theatre enterprise. If the 40 minute film did slide over the financial problems, it did show . . what can be done by a town of 19,000. It also points out very clearly,in the clipped words of Tyrone Guthrie, that quality in the theatre is important, and that quality costs money.

Wage and welfare discussion talks between Actors Equity and the League of NY Theatres have opened. The main battle prior to the signing of a new two year contract promises to be over the actors union demand for a weekly assessments of 5% of payroll on producer for the Equity Welfare Fund. If granted other theatre unions would probably demand equal payments.

Plays

Though the producers point out that the many recent awards to their show have no connection with an increase in box office prices, Teahouse of the August Moon has raised its week end top to $5.95. It was also denied the increase was due to new contracts with David Wayne and John Forsythe...All Summer Long, Robert Anderson play will be presented by Playwrights Company with John Kerr and his mother, June Walker, in the fall...Port Authority of NY, Public Service of NJ, and Newarker Restaurant are sponsoring "Show Bus Specials" from various NJ towns.

People

Estimated NYC attendance at 32 shows, on and off Broadway, by "CD" is 186,000 for the current week...Barbara Baxley will replace Anne Jackson in Oh Men, Oh Women at end of May...Lilo and Gwen Verdon have both renewed their Can-Can contracts. Norwood Smith will replace Peter Cookson in musical June 7...Tod Andrews will replace Joseph Cotton in Sabrina Fair early in June...YMCA and ANTA have set up a Counselling Service to provide advice for young theatre hopefuls...Vernon Rice, drama editor of NY Post, died at age 46.

Award Department

Pulitzer Prize for best American play of season won by Teahouse of August Moon. ...Josephine Hull, Solid Gold Cadillac won the Delia Austrian Medal of the Drama League of NY for "the most distinguished performance of the year"...Phyllis Wynn, Brooklyn, and Paul Lukather, Beverly Hills, won the Barter Theatre Auditions.

Theatre Record Notes

Columbia Records will record original cast album of The Pajama Game...Rachel Records will release original cast album of World of Sholom Aleichem...MGM recorded original cast album of Three Penny Opera...Carol Channing and Eddie Bracken are featured in "Archie & Mehitabel" album made by Columbia with David Wayne narrating.

CRITICAL DIGEST
505 Fifth Ave, NYC

FIRST CLASS MAIL